

# Zone Report 2018

## **Higher Education**

Vice President:  
**Amatey Doku**

# Zone Conference Report

## Vice President (Higher Education)

### Introduction

This paper sets out the accountability report from the Zone Vice President. It also contains a summary of Zone Policy 2016 – 2019.

### Questions

Any Individual Student member of the National Union of Students' may ask a question of the Vice President. Questions must be submitted in advance of the Conference using the online form. You will be asked to state your name and Constituent Member (your Student Union or Association).

You can access the form to ask accountability questions at:

<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/conferences/zone-conferences/accountability>

The deadline for submission of accountability questions is Wednesday 24 October at 12.30pm. Questions will be asked during the accountability sessions at Zones Conference.

### Outgoing Committee

Last year's Zone Committee was:

Vice President: Amatey Doku

Diko Blackings	HE Zone Committee (NEC place)
Angel Layer	HE Zone Committee
Azza Abdullah	HE Zone Committee
Emily Andrews	HE Zone Committee
Kobby Ofori	HE Zone Committee
Mason Ammar	HE Zone Committee
Nicola Hemmings	HE Zone Committee
Taylor McGraa	HE Zone Committee
Zak Kaf Al-Ghazal	HE Zone Committee

### Zone Committee 2018/19

Elections for the Zone Committee (including the NEC place) will be taking place at the Zone Conference. Any individual student member of the NUS from FE can nominate themselves online to be a member of the committee. Nominations are online via a form and the deadline for nominations is 24 October 2018 at 12.30pm.

More details of the election and the nomination form can be found at:

<https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/zones/elections>

### Dates of Committee Meetings 2018/19

Date of meetings for this Zone are: 15 November 2018, 23 January 2019, 19 March 2019, 29 May 2019

# Higher Education Zone

## Summary of Policy 2016 - 2019

**The following document summarises policy active for 2018-19 in the Higher Education Zone, covering policy passed at NUS National Conference in 2016, 2017 and 2018**

### Overview

#### **National Conference 2018**

Motion HE101 | Tackling the Black Attainment Gap

Motion HE102 | Students and Brexit

Motion HE103 | High course costs are destroying student mental health

Motion HE104 | Quality of Teaching

Motion HE105 | Postgraduate Tuition Fees and Funding

#### **National Conference 2017**

Motion 202 | JoJo doesn't know much about quality: what a wonderful world HE could be

Motion 204 | Partnership is (almost) dead, long live student power

Motion 206 | Free Education

#### **National Conference 2016**

Motion 201 | Divorce our courses from market forces

Motion 203 | Employability isn't working

Motion 205 | Liberate My Degree

NC\_HE\_13215: HE To Left Of Me FE To The Right, HE In FE Stuck In The Middle Confused

reintroduction of maintenance grants are central to tackling the attainment gap.

Issues of race inequality cannot be divorced from other issues in education.

#### **How NUS should work in this area**

NUS should work with other sector agencies, other student and activist groups and the Black Students' Campaign to approach this work.

NUS should tackle the attainment gap by lobbying for institutional and national awareness and interventions, and campaign for institutions to take responsibility for and lead on addressing it. There should be proportional emphasis on student-led campaigning. There should be interventions targeted at students who experience racial inequity, such as careers advice and scholarships.

The Race Equality Charter should be a baseline requirement for all HE institutions, and funding which was in place for sector-level work on differential outcomes should continue. NUS should work with UCU to develop student-staff campaign strategies on the attainment gap.

### Policy Passed in 2018

#### **Tackling the Black Attainment Gap**

##### **What NUS believes**

The black attainment gap exists within institutions once all other factors in attainment have been removed. It should be viewed, in part, as a symptom of multiple issues affecting the education sector which disproportionately impact Black students. Long-term, calls for free and democratic education and the

National interventions should include the release of attainment gap data across higher education, and penalties for institutions which do not close the attainment gap from the relevant regulators. There should be work undertaken by the sector to assess race inequality in subjects with supervisions, e.g nursing, arts and research degrees. The TEF, which has not been adequately analysed to see if it suppresses race inequalities outcomes, should not be used as a regulatory tactic to tackle the attainment gap.

### **How students' unions should be engaged**

Students' unions should be equipped with models for institutional data gathering and campaigning guides, and materials should be developed around decolonising the curriculum in partnership with black students and academics.

### **Related active policy**

This area of work is also related to the policy *Liberate My Degree [2016]*, which directed NUS to prioritise developing strategic approaches to tackling attainment gaps. This includes:

- continuing the Liberate My Degree campaign for education more representative of a diverse student body
- Developing and updating resources on teaching & learning and decolonising education
- Developing long-term mechanisms for measuring the impact of initiatives
- Supporting campaigns for more inclusive curricula on campuses

## **Students and Brexit**

### **What NUS believes**

Brexit is dangerous to the UK Higher Education sector and its students and academics. It threatens to limit the mobility of students in Europe, brings about restrictive immigration policies for EU students and academics, and has stoked a rise in xenophobic and racist hate crime. A hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would be detrimental to students of the two countries.

### **How NUS should work in this area**

NUS should collaborate with allied organisations across Europe on Brexit. NUS should campaign to protect student mobility after Brexit, and work with SUs and activist groups in the UK, as well as lobbying MPs and MEPs. NUS should campaign to remove international students from net migration targets, and for special immigration status for EU and UK students and academics to ensure they can move across the EU freely for work and study. NUS should campaign for the UK to remain a full member of Erasmus+.

NUS UK should work with NUS-USI to ensure that students in Ireland and the Republic of Ireland do not face new restrictions travelling between the two countries.

NUS should campaign for a second referendum on the deal negotiated on Brexit. It should campaign for continued membership of the single market and the rights of EU nationals to live and study in the UK.

### **How students' unions should be engaged**

Students' unions should be supported to campaign locally and nationally to protect student mobility after Brexit.

## **High course costs are destroying student mental health**

### **What NUS believes**

Hidden course costs are particularly prevalent in arts degrees. Course costs, particularly for final projects, can make students feel anxious and demotivated by the amount they are expected to spend, and there isn't often clear guidance on course costs when students begin.

There are other points in the student lifecycle that hidden costs can be particularly impactful, such as audition fees on application, which can shut working class students out of applying, and gown hire at graduation.

### **How NUS should work in this area**

NUS should lobby institutions to take an audit of the cost of assessments in arts degrees, including how they affect students from low income backgrounds, or those who are BME and LGBT+.

NUS should also publish a list of all institutions which charge audition fees.

NUS should conduct research into the average cost of graduation across the UK, and work to reduce it with institutions, as well as by lobbying Ede & Ravenscroft, the major robe supplier, to lower their robe prices. A student-owned social enterprise model for supplying gowns and graduation photographs should be investigated.

### **How students' unions should be engaged**

NUS will support students' unions to research the correlation between hidden costs and student welfare, as well as support students' unions to lobby for clear information on course costs, personal finance training for students and progress towards free assessments utilising

new technology. NUS should produce a toolkit for students' unions to lobby their institutions to abolish audition fees or introduce fee waivers and bursaries.

## Quality of teaching

### What NUS believes

The teaching that higher education students receive is sometimes of a poor quality, and delivered by those who are not trained to teach, or lack support structures for training and development.

### How NUS should work in this area

NUS should lobby to ensure universities allocate greater funding to the retention and development of teaching assistants to support lecturers. They should also lobby universities to research the international experience of how they can enhance the quality of teaching.

### How students' unions should be engaged

NUS should work with local SUs and universities to develop more effective support for teaching staff, particularly postgraduate students who teach, and resources for those who are personal tutors.

## Postgraduate Tuition Fees & Funding

### What NUS believes

While many universities have targeted interventions for undergraduates from low income backgrounds, these are often not extended to postgraduate students. As a consequence, postgraduate students must then take on additional jobs to fund their studies, causing them additional stress and constraints. For some students who are not able to receive support from their families, course costs are a better measurement of the amount of funding needed than household incomes.

### How NUS should work in this area

NUS should lobby the government to provide universities with funding to create substantial schemes of bursaries and grants for postgraduate students from low income backgrounds, and to stress the importance of this by writing to each member of the Education Select Committee.

The Office for Students and Research Councils should be lobbied to provide more equitable funding across subjects, by increasing funding for those subjects not currently receiving much.

NUS should lobby for:

- A stabilised and transparent baseline fee
- Fee caps on postgraduate fees
- A separate fee and maintenance loan for postgraduate students
- Funding for international students that is comparative to that for home students

NUS should lobby for a review on the impact of postgraduate loans, with a focus on whether the loan amount is sufficient to cover living costs.

### How students' unions should be engaged

Resources should be created for students' unions to make the case for bursaries to their institutions. NUS should advise SUs on how to fight for postgraduate issues, such as contact hours and value for money.

## Policy passed in 2017

### JoJo doesn't know much about quality: what a wonderful world HE could be

### What NUS believes

The student movement is opposed to marketisation, and believes that true teaching excellence comes from partnership between staff and students rather than tools like the TEF.

### How NUS should work in this area

NUS should produce research outlining the benefits of moving away from student satisfaction and towards student engagement. NUS should also produce a manifesto for teaching excellence, and initiate research on student perspectives on education.

Following a plan for responding to the Higher Education and Research Bill, NUS should campaign for fair and meaningful representation of students in university governance, as well as specifically challenging the erosion of student involvement in quality processes.

NUS should campaign against the implementation of a national survey of Postgraduate Taught students.

The development of new measures of learning gain should be supported, and how institutions can collaborate to improve their provision should be investigated.

NUS should work with the University and College Union (UCU) to investigate the ways in which women academics are disadvantaged in current teaching practices.

#### **How students' unions should be engaged**

Students' unions should be supported to lobby their institutions to engage a diverse range of students in their TEF and Access & Participation Plan submissions. They should also be supported to run effective course rep systems.

#### **Related active policy**

This policy links with *Divorce Our Courses from Market Forces [2016]*, which responded to the Higher Education Green Paper. It committed NUS to campaign against marketisation and changes to higher education, to boycott the NSS, producing guidance for SUs on combatting marketisation, and work at a sector level to push for change collectively as well as through lobbying MPs.

## **Partnership is (almost) dead, long live student power!**

#### **What NUS believes**

While partnership between unions and institutions has previously been a useful framework that has pushed back the view of students as consumers, it is often an unbalanced relationship and the language has been co-opted by government and institutions.

Students and students' unions have frequently been damaged by the partnership agenda that is meant to empower them, accused of undermining partnership for being membership-led against the interests of their institution and in the interests of students.

Students are not consumers, and need actual power to make change. One way to do this is by making use of laws around student protections to advance students' interests.

#### **How NUS should work in this area**

NUS should work alongside students' unions on identifying our political and lobbying power by organising student groups and creating truly engaging mass campaigns.

NUS should lobby the OfS to focus on student protections.

#### **How students' unions should be engaged**

NUS should provide support to students' unions when universities take action against them for following their democratically agreed policies.

NUS should produce guidance for students' unions on:

- How to change partnership agreements to reflect expected behaviours when disagreements occur
- How to make use of consumer law to protect students' interests
- Democratising student representation

## **Free Education**

#### **What NUS believes**

Higher education is a public good and should be free for everyone to access, and is a right not a privilege. Fees and debt are a barrier to accessing education.

Free education would pay for itself – for every £1 invested in education, there is a return of £2.60; but the vast wealth in society is with a handful of people rather than being invested in socially useful things such as education – and without redistributing this wealth, we do not have a democratic society. There would be enough money to fund free education if the government increased corporation tax and tax on the wealthy, scrapped Trident or reduced military spending.

Successive governments have increased marketisation in education, and the symptoms of this is rising fees related to the TEF and closing down colleges in FE. In FE, marketization has also meant loss of EMA, job losses and the growth of student/staff ratios. In HE, the TEF and its link to differentiated fees based on TEF ratings will harm social mobility.

While believing in free education is crucial, the priority is tackling student hardship and stopping further fee increases. Abolishing fees



is insufficient if students are impoverished or excluded by the cost of living.

NUS's vision for free education is part of a wider transformation of the education system to achieve a liberated and accessible system for all.

#### **How NUS should work in this area**

NUS should oppose all methods of charging students for education, and place this in a broader campaign for a fully liberated, democratically-controlled education system, prioritizing stopping fee increases and campaigning for a truly free education in HE and FE. NUS should maintain materials which put forward a vision for a publicly-funded and accessible post-16 education system.

#### **How students' unions should be engaged**

NUS should endorse the fee strike by Goldsmiths MA Social Work students.

Reforms to higher education have led in many cases to competition between HE and FE providers of higher education rather than collaboration as existed previously. Colleges will in some cases need to work very hard to ensure a high-quality higher education environment for HE students. To date, not nearly enough has been done to understand the different learning context of HE in FE students, and how these students can best engage with their learning and be represented to their institutions.

#### **How NUS should work in this area**

The HE and FE zones should work closely together to understand HE in FE students' needs and support HE students to represent them. NUS UK should decide which zone HE in FE students fall into. Differences across nations should be taken into account.

#### **How students' unions should be engaged**

NUS should develop and produce briefings, reports and other information as appropriate to support HE and FE unions to understand and represent these students.

## **Policy passed in 2016**

### **Employability isn't working**

#### **What NUS believes**

There are large inequalities in the labour market, and the employability agenda isn't working within higher education.

#### **How NUS should work in this area**

Trade union membership should be promoted to students and recent graduates, and the Commission on the Future of Work should be expanded, and there should be research on how students understand employability. There should also be better data available on employment destinations and what constitutes a 'graduate job.'

#### **How students' unions should be engaged**

Students' unions should be supported to provide realistic careers information, advice and guidance and have guidance to campaign for careers services to combat social inequality.

## **HE To Left Of Me FE To The Right, HE In FE Stuck In The Middle Confused**

#### **What NUS believes**

# Zone Conference Accountability

## Vice President (Higher Education) Zones Report

**Author:** Amatey Doku

**Date Produced:** September 2018

### Update on Key Priority Areas: Brexit and the Black Attainment Gap

Priority area	Area of work	Progress
Black Attainment Gap	NUS-UUK Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Organised 5 roundtables alongside Universities UK in Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Glasgow, Sheffield and in London to be held before Christmas</li><li>Bringing together student representatives and university leaders to tackle the Black Attainment Gap with a strong focus on sharing best practice and collating all that good practice into a report published in the new year</li></ul>
Black Attainment Gap	Influencing the new Widening Access and Participation Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Office for Students has put out a consultation on overhauling the Widening Access and Participation Plans</li><li>NUS submitted a response to the consultation</li><li>We briefed SUs on the consultation and ran a series of webinars</li><li>Written to Nations Officers to discuss how we can ensure that targets on the attainment gap are implemented UK wide</li><li>Attended a roundtable at 10 Downing Street as part of the Race Disparity Audit, raising the profile of the Attainment Gap in govt.</li></ul>
Brexit	People's Vote Demo Mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Published a 20 page guide for SUs on how to mobilise for the People's Vote Demo on 20<sup>th</sup> October</li><li>Published a "Winning the Arguments" Briefing for SUs to explain to students why a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal is so important</li><li>Secured £20,000 worth of funding for SUs to pay for minibuses and coaches down to the demo</li><li>Spoken at 4 rallies in University cities in the run up to the People's Vote Demo</li></ul>



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## Higher Education Sector Engagements

As part of my role I represent students on various Higher Education Sector Committees and engage with various sector agencies. Below are the commitments I have had since July:

- UK Standing Committee on Quality Assurance
- Advance HE Board (New merger from Equality Challenge Unit, Higher Education Academy and Leadership Foundation)
- Attended a Board Away Day of the Office for Students
- Met with the Director of Higher Education Policy and Strategy
- Office for Students Consultation on the new Widening Access and Participation Plans
- Visited several cities as a Commissioner on the Civic University Commission
- Spoke on a panel about Race and Higher Education at UUK Conference

## Other engagements

- Represented NUS at both Labour and Conservative Party Conferences speaking at panels on HE, Widening Participation and Brexit
- Alongside VP FE, represented students on the Student Reference Group of the independent review into fees and funding

## Membership Engagement

- Visited 25 Students' Unions since July, including a number of Black History Month events in October
  - Attended and spoke at the Small and Specialists' meet up at UCA
  - Attended and spoke at "The Gathering" in Scotland
  - Attended at spoke at Y Talwrn in Wales
-